

Healthier Product Reformulation in Malaysia



Health Conscious in Malaysia

The health concern of Malaysia has reached an alarming rate with approximately half of the population being overweight or obese. This also leads to a worrying trend with the prevalence of population is suffering from hypercholesterolemia (48%) and diabetes (18%). About one in four children who aged under five years old are underweight or stunted with higher rates in rural areas as poverty and food insecurity is a bigger issue.

Malaysian should change their eating habits

Quality, taste and price with clear display of nutritional information and ingredient list are the top drivers of product choice when consumers do their shopping. 53% of these consumers claimed they look out for these information regularly. According to the consumer reviews, 99% of Malaysian are trying to improve their diet. Sugar becomes consumers' biggest nutritional concern where 57% of them will check on the labels for sugar information. There are 42% of consumers are actively trying to improve their diet by reducing sugar intakes.

A three quarter Malaysian consumers believe manufacturers should be actively working on tweaking their recipes to make product healthier but tasty. Consumers are willing to accept the products reformulate including low or non-calorie sweeteners instead of sugar as long as they are still tasty.

Reformulation is a pivotal move by manufacturers

Adding dietary fibre, reducing sugar and salt are the main focus for manufacturers in healthier product reformulation. They have been making a variety of changes to recipes and reformulating with lower or zero calorie substitutes as well as displaying front-of-pack nutrition labelling across some or all of their products. Most importantly, the healthier version products should be able to gain consumer acceptability while maintain their good taste.

Manufacturers reduce the use of sugar in their food and drinks and seek to provide healthier food choice to consumers. They are making some approaches to support their reformulation programme including making a variety of changes to a recipe simultaneously and replacing ingredients with lower or zero calorie substitutes (59%), followed by fortifying products with additional ingredients (53%).

Welcome Sugar Tax

Malaysia imposes new sugar taxation on beverages in 2019 as a measurement to reduce sugar consumption and improve health outcomes. The adoption of front-of-pack labelling including Healthier Choice Logo and Guideline Daily Amount (GDA) are good indicators of the food products and make the gauging process easier.

Government should increase consumer education on nutrition labelling to enable consumers make a healthiest option from those foods with excessive sugar, salt or sodium. Thus, simple yet approachable labelling on food packaging is vital.

In a nutshell

Government should put a comprehensive approach in educating consumers on healthy eating behaviors and healthy lifestyles regardless at school, work places and community groups. Manufacturers should be actively working on reformulating their product recipes while maintaining the existing taste and flavor profiles to not disaffect consumers. Meanwhile, these shocking statistics should be worrying enough for Malaysian to warrant an immediate change in their lifestyle habits as well as consumption patterns.

References

IGD. (2019). Healthier Product Reformulation in Malaysia: Consumer and Company Research on Progress and Priorities.